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ABSTRACT

A study examined the situated and idiosyncratic writing strategies of a stratified purposeful sampling of five second and third grade children and the interplay between their strategy use and the multi-layered instructional contexts created by their teacher. Over a period of one school year, qualitative data (field notes, interviews, tape recordings, writing samples, and documents) were collected through various methods. The writing styles and strategies of these students revealed that there is more to writing than actual pen to paper behaviors. Every focus child was different. For each child, writing was an idiosyncratic series of decisions, strategies, and behaviors that also fluctuated according to the context, genre, and writing instruction. The teacher did not set rigid standards for writing because specific expectations for writing would contradict her stated philosophical stance about children and their need for exploration and discovery through language. Findings suggest that contrasting writers were able to discover and refine their idiosyncratic writing processes within this teacher's classroom. Research needs to continue to reconceptualize child writers so that they can be viewed as individuals. (Contains 40 references and 5 figures representing children's writings and drawings.) (RS)

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Supporting the Idiosyncratic Strategies of Children

Paper Presented at the annual meeting of

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Jenifer Jasinski Schneider

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Undoing "The" Writing Process:

Supporting the Idiosyncratic Writing Strategies of Children

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"It's time for writing workshop." Ann's simple statement signaled an entire classroom of third grade students into action. Some children went to the back of the room to remove their writing folders from the storage crates. Others looked for their pencils, markers, or their friends. In a matter of moments, children were writing in all of the nooks and crannies of the room.

My first observation of writing workshop (Atwell, 1987; Calkins, 1994; Graves, 1983) was convincing. The teacher strategically roamed around the room engaging in discussions with individual children while students wrote and shared with each other. I was impressed with writing workshop; it was an effective mechanism for creating writers. Then I observed the children.

I conducted a case study of one third-grade boy named Cody. The purpose of these observations was to document the writing behaviors of a child, and Ann, the teacher, selected Cody. For several weeks, I followed Cody and observed what Ann did not see. Cody wrote quickly at the end of writing workshop, when he knew he would be held accountable for producing. The rest of the time he played with his pencils and friends. He made many visits to the dictionary and pencil sharpener. Cody was engaged in writing workshop, but his engagement in writing was minimal.

Following five weeks with Cody, I began to observe and interview three additional children: Amber, Joseph, and Charles. Over a period of six weeks, the writing, behavior, and comments of all four students revealed that the children exhibited writing behaviors that were not discussed by Calkins (1994), and their writing strategies were not consistent with process writing.

First, the children's required attention to "rehearsing" (Calkins, 1994; Graves, 1983) was an artificial practice. For example, Joseph planned by tracing his hand, and then he wrote a word on each finger. He stated that his goal was to fill all five fingers with words. Comments such as this led me to conclude that planning webs and pre-writing notebooks were not necessary.

Second, when the students began to draft their texts, they rarely referred to their planning sheets. On occasions when planning sheets were used, the children connected randomly associated thoughts from the plans. They did not consider their purpose or the progression of their thoughts.

Third, the children were more attentive to the rules of writing workshop (e.g., when to turn in drafts, how to create webs, and where, when, and with whom to conference) than their writing. When questioned about their writing, they revealed a limited sense of ownership in that a majority of their work was geared toward conferences with Ann and approval from her.

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For these aforementioned reasons, it was reasonable to question the degree to which writer's workshop was effective in supporting child writers. The "writerly life" (Calkins, 1994) that students were supposed to be living was absent. The real needs and behaviors of child writers were not understood, supported, or allowed to flourish. Although Ann delivered textbook "mini-lessons" and conferences (Calkins, 1994), the children's idiosyncratic writing strategies were not recognized within a process approach. Therefore, I concluded that writing workshop was a method for teaching writing that may be artificial for many children. I initiated a subsequent study to further explore child writers in contexts beyond the writing process and writing workshop.

Theoretical Frame

Misconceptions about Writing and Writing Instruction

In elementary classrooms it is expected that children will learn how to write (Braddock, Lloyd-Jones & Schoer, 1963; Hillocks, 1986). Building on the work of Graves (1975), Calkins (1994) developed instructional methods that allow time for writing and incorporate the underlying assumptions of the "process model" of writing. This approach is deemed appropriate for children because teachers encourage students to individually and recursively apply their own process of planning, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing (Atwell, 1987; Calkins, 1994; Routman, 1987).

Although many teachers and researchers have made the assumption that these methods are appropriate for child writers, others report that process writing and writing workshop are limited, artificial, and misunderstood (King, 1995; Lensmire, 1994; National Council of Teachers of English, 1996). Oftentimes, during writing workshop, students write for writing's sake and not for communicative purposes. Students also write in predetermined steps, (i.e., planning drafting, revising, editing, and publishing) and this often produces contrived writing behaviors.

Although there is discussion about the recursiveness of writing, there is also a persistent conceptualization and labeling of writing as "the" writing process. The assiduous devotion to five writing steps is perpetuated in textbooks, workshops, and curriculum guides (e.g., Temple & Gillet, 1996; Thompkins & Hoskisson, 1995). The prescriptive language used to describe process writing damages the promotion of the recursive and fluid nature of writing. In addition, process writing and writing workshop do not accommodate the idiosyncratic strategies children naturally use.

There are conceptual problems with writing workshop and process writing, yet teachers are

unaware of them. Teachers are supplied with new methods for writing instruction, but they are not presented with a thorough understanding of children's writing. Teachers receive the time, practice, and training to make fundamental shifts in their conceptions about their own writing, but they do not investigate the strategies of children.

If teachers are to facilitate students' writing development, they must first understand the nature of children's writing. Based on research on children, coupled with theories about cognitive development, there are general assumptions that can be made about the origins of children's writing and its continued development in the context of school.

Children's Writing Development

When children learn to write, they begin with scribbles and marks that are used to explore their worlds (DeFord, 1980). Eventually, through experience and interactions with expert others, these marks begin to carry meaning (Vygotsky, 1978). Writing develops into a form of language in which words represent objects. As writing progresses and letters are used conventionally, drawing continues to accompany writing (Chapman, 1994; Daiute, 1990). Dyson (1991) found that drawing often directs writing, giving children images and ideas from which to write down words.

Oral language is another tool children use to develop their knowledge about writing (Britton, 1970). Oral language is used when children seek information or elaborate upon the meaning of their written text (Dyson, 1983). Children use talk to mediate, supplement, and parallel their writing efforts (Daiute, 1993; DiPardo & Freedman, 1988; Dyson, 1983, 1995; Heath, 1991). Therefore, for different purposes, children use talk before, during, and after writing events.

In addition to drawing and talking, play is a part of creating texts. Whether it is physical play, playfulness with language, or dramatic exchanges, play is important to writing (Daiute, 1990, Mills, 1983; Roskos, 1988; Vukelich, 1993). During free dramatic play, children often imitate life and incorporate writing into their pretend activities (Bissex, 1980; Dyson, 1990; Taylor, 1983). Writing can also be the result of more organized "play" events, such as process drama (Heathcote & Bolton, 1995; O'Neill & Lambert, 1982). The cooperatively created scenes of process drama provide contexts in which the students and the teacher "play" the parts of other people. In the unscripted scenes of process drama, children may perform many writing tasks in the roles of other people.

Although talk, drawing, and play have been discussed separately, they are uniquely woven together in an intricate web based upon each child's experiences with language and print. Some children draw before writing; some children draw after writing. Some children talk and write, while others do not. Some children play while producing a text, and some children may use their text as a way to initiate play with others. Writing is truly an idiosyncratic process.

Child writers are specialized individuals who rely on their own experiences and mental capabilities to create text, but they do not write or attend school in isolation. Children learn to write in the context of school, surrounded by other individualized writers; writers who may want and need to play, talk, and draw when they write. In this way, children's writing is shaped by classroom contexts and the teacher's instructional decisions (Clay, 1991; DiPardo & Freedman, 1988; Dyson, 1995). However, children also affect the teacher, the context, and their peers through writing (Dyson, 1995; Lensmire, 1994). Therefore, writing is also social.

Based on the aforementioned characteristics of children's writing (i.e., writing is an idiosyncratic symbolization process; writing is a social act; writing is culturally and socially situated; writing is interrelated with talk, drawing, and play), there is clearly a need to develop instructional methods that acknowledge children's writing abilities, yet move them forward. Teachers need instructional methods that complement children's idiosyncratic processes and build upon their understanding of written communication, not methods that force children into molds or demand laborious revisions from students who are only beginning to understand the power of writing.

In order to further understand children's natural writing behaviors, I examined the situated and idiosyncratic writing strategies of five second and third grade children and the interplay between their strategy use and the multi-layered instructional contexts created by their teacher. My primary question for this study was: How are children's writing processes and products affected by classroom contexts and their teacher's instructional practices? Specifically, I examined (a) what the children believed about writing and the idiosyncratic strategies they used and (b) how the teacher's methods and contexts influenced the students' writing.

Methodology

In order to examine the participant students' writing strategies and their teacher's instructional practices, I needed to understand the complexity of the naturally occurring social

interactions of the classroom (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992). A field study was conducted in one elementary classroom, using individual case studies of the teacher and five of her students (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Glesne & Peshkin, 1992; Marshall & Rossman, 1995; Patton, 1990). I utilized naturalistic inquiry which is a process-oriented approach to research that minimizes the researcher's manipulation or control of the study setting allowing for discovery and change (Patton, 1990).

The focus teacher was an African American, veteran teacher who taught a second and third grade class in an urban elementary school in the midwest. Sondra Stevens (pseudonym) was asked to participate because she believed that children should write everyday for real purposes. She taught in a school that adhered to an informal philosophy (i.e., instruction was holistic; children addressed faculty and staff by their first names; classrooms were multi-aged grouped; and most children remained with their teacher for two years) and this affected the classroom climate.

Selection of student participants was based on the premise that writing is idiosyncratic; therefore, any number of students, of either gender and any race could be selected and the focus children would represent a range of writers. The selection of participants was made with Sondra's input and approval and based on her assessments. From the class base of 25 students, stratified purposeful sampling (Patton, 1990) was used to identify two above average, two average, and two below average writers. Social group, gender, race, and age were also considered. Although these factors were important, they were not equally represented. However, the sample did include a range of writers (pseudonyms): Cristina and Karla, two Caucasian, female third graders; Teshawn, an African American, female second grader and John, a Caucasian, male third grader; and Kianna an African American, female second grader and Ricky, a Caucasian, male second grader. Eventually, John was removed from the study based on his negative reactions to observations and interviews.

Over a period of one school year, qualitative data were collected through various methods. I entered the classroom as an observer and, at the students' invitation, became a participant observer. I directly observed Sondra and the students in natural situations throughout the school day. Complete field notes of all observations and interviews were kept. Whole group instruction and individual conversations that centered around writing and the writing contexts were tape recorded and transcribed. Formal and informal interviews with the teacher and students were conducted, tape recorded, and transcribed. I also copied writing samples and documents. In order to collect

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data that were relevant and informative, data sources and methods were triangulated (Patton, 1990).

As data were collected, they were organized chronologically for preliminary content analyses (Marshall & Rossman, 1995). Negative cases were identified and analyzed, and they led to further and refined data collection. Eventually, when data collection was complete, a systematic and focused analysis was conducted (Patton, 1990). The data were examined for emerging themes related to the research questions (Patton, 1990). Field notes and transcripts were read, and comments or activities related to the students' writing behaviors or Sondra's instruction were underlined. Temporary labels were ascribed to the data to facilitate the identification of themes.

Based on these labels, themes were identified in the students' writing practices and Sondra's instruction. From these themes, permanent codes were developed. The data were relabeled with these codes to provide easy access to pertinent information. This organization enabled me to focus the analysis and address the research questions (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992; Marshall & Rossman, 1995). Member checks were conducted with Sondra and the students throughout data collection and analysis procedures to ensure triangulation of interpretation.

Results

Classroom Contexts and Teaching Strategies

Content analyses of observations, transcripts, interviews, written documents, and writing samples revealed that Sondra created five unique contexts for writing throughout the day: Unit Writing, Writers as Writers, Journal Writing, Special Event Writing, and Math Story Writing. Analysis of instruction across these contexts revealed that she utilized five instructional strategies: whole group instruction, shared writing, individual conferencing, reading writing out loud, and independent writing. In the following sections, I will briefly describe Sondra's writing program.

Unit Writing

Unit Writing was a unique context because Sondra used process drama to involve the students in imaginary situations in which they explored issues in the roles of other people. The process drama scenes resembled childhood play and created opportunities for diverse writing events.

From September to February, Sondra involved the students in two units, each lasting approximately three months. The first drama was a dangerous journey to establish a peaceful new

land. In the role of the group leader, Sondra pretended the students were adults answering a newspaper advertisement calling for recruits for the peace mission. She addressed the students by their surnames and treated them as adults as they embarked on their journey. The second drama required the students to imagine they were reporters who were investigating immigration for the government. During this drama, the students conducted research and interviews as reporters, but they also imagined they were the actual immigrants who came to America.

In order to prepare students for the dramas and familiarize them with the content, Sondra read literature, provided demonstrations, showed videos, and planned field trips. On a daily basis, the units were built through drama in combination with these other instructional strategies.

Writers as Writers

Writers as Writers was the time when the students were to behave and write as "real" writers. Writers as Writers occurred in the morning following unit work, in the afternoon following recess, or at any other time when Sondra felt that the students needed time to write independently.

Writers as Writers usually began without whole group instruction because it was part of the classroom routine. Students did not have individual desks, so they went to their Writing Studios which were self-selected spaces in all the areas of the classroom. They wrote independently or with other children, and they were encouraged to talk, play, and draw. Students were allowed to write in any genre, but Writers as Writers was most often used for fictional writing.

On occasion, Sondra conducted rug meetings, or "mini-lessons", in which she introduced the students to new writing information. For example, at one point, Sondra introduced "Story Plan" sheets that required the students to write plans for their texts. Each child was asked to use the Story Plan, and then Sondra and the child determined if it was helpful to his or her writing. Sondra's remaining instruction during Writers as Writers was centered around individual conferences. Upon the completion of a book, the students shared their writing with Sondra. She did not conference with the students as they composed text, unless they elicited her help. There were also formal times when the children shared their writing by reading it to the whole class.

Journal Writing

Journal Writing occurred before school and during center time. The children wrote about their lives, and upon the completion of their journal entries, shared their writing with Sondra. If

Sondra was unable to read the writing that day, the children returned their journals to the storage bins. Then, during the next journal time, Sondra read and responded to the previous entries.

Special Event Writing

Special Event Writing was guided by current world events, classroom experiences, or Sondra's ideas. Without exception, Special Event Writing was limited by time: it was not progressive or ongoing. Also, without exception, Special Event Writing was initiated by direct, whole group instruction, followed by writing, and completed by individual conferencing. Finally, Special Event Writing was carefully edited and the entire writing event culminated with product displays on the classroom or hallway bulletin boards. An example of Special Event Writing occurred when the students visited a Roy Lichtenstein art exhibit and wrote poetry in response.

Math Story Writing.

Math Story Writing was a special way to use writing in a math context. Using shared writing, Sondra and the students created an adventure story which was intended to simulate children's video games in that there were certain levels to reach and rewards to receive. The attainment of these levels paralleled the completion of the students' math chapter tests.

After detailed discussions, the class voted on the direction of the math story. Sondra wrote the ideas down and then transferred them to a bulletin board. Sondra and the students added to the story every 4 to 6 weeks. As they wrote new adventures to rescue the story's hero, the students received tiny items (critter erasers, skateboard erasers, etc.) as tokens for their rescue efforts.

A Typical Day

Sondra's classroom was flexible. The following is a general outline of the day; however, Sondra frequently altered the schedule to accommodate the children's needs. The day usually began with Journal Writing as the children entered the room. After the bell, the students went to art, dance, or music classes. When they arrived back in the classroom, a rug meeting was held in which the events of the day were discussed. Then Sondra transitioned the students into their unit/drama work which lasted about 1.5 hours. Following unit time, the children began Writers as Writers. After Writers as Writers, they had recess and lunch. Then the children participated in Sustained Silent Reading for one half hour, while Sondra met with reading groups. The remaining children participated in centers. There was a second recess followed by 15 minutes of relaxation in which

Sondra led the children through imagery exercises related to their unit work. Following relaxation, there was 1 hour of math time. The day concluded with clean up time and a read aloud.

Sondra perceived her instruction to be an amalgamation of techniques obtained after years of teaching and reflecting. In the following excerpt, Sondra summarized her unique writing program.

> You get a conglomeration of ideas and things you read from books and all of that. . . . You synthesize it and homogenize it and even pasteurize it [laughing], and. . . it comes out whatever you are. . . . I don't think that I could go into some situation and teach other people to do [what I do]. I mean you can show them the framework, but. . . it comes out that person because they're going to mix it with all of their values. And writing is so personal anyway. When they look at a child's writing, they're going to see something different than what I see because maybe I'm seeing all of how I see that person and all of what I've watched as far as that development. . . . There might be certain days when I say, 'This "i" needs to be capitalized, go back and capitalize it.' The next day I might not say anything about that "i", but I may have a reason that had to do with both the rhythm going on between that person and me that day, or. . . what I think that person needs that moment.

Sondra recognized that the way she designed her classroom and taught writing were as much a reflection of her personality as any "textbook" method or practice. She became a writing teacher based on her beliefs about how writing happens, why children need to write, and how she could support writing. Sondra reconceptualized writing instruction to fit the needs of her students.

The Idiosyncratic Writing Strategies of the Children

The purpose of this section is to present the five focus children as individual writers who were situated within certain classroom contexts. A diverse array of writing events and samples are included to highlight each child's strategies.

Cristina

Cristina was a very thoughtful, third-grade child who enjoyed lively social interactions, as well as quiet moments alone with books. Cristina possessed above average academic ability and demonstrated that she was a dedicated and motivated student. She was mostly quiet in whole group settings, but she also contributed to class discussions with confidence. During independent work, Cristina was more social, but also diligent. Overall, Cristina had a sweet disposition and

kind nature, yet she displayed an attitude of academic superiority on rare occasions. To the exclusion of others, Cristina spent almost all classroom moments with her best friend, Karla. They were inseparable, and despite some competition, Sondra allowed them to remain as such because "they work together in ways that teachers like. They help each other to write."

Cristina's Writing Strategies. During Writers as Writers, Cristina drew upon her rich literary background to create stories. She used common literary devices, storybook language, and animal characters in her texts. Cristina felt that reading literature helped her writing. She stated, "I think [reading books] makes me know about stories and how to write them and makes a lot of people like them because the kind of stories I like, a lot of people also like them."

Over periods of days and weeks, Cristina worked on detailed stories with elaborate plots. She began the year with, "The Three Little Bunnies and One Little Squirrel" (Figure 1) and she continued to write the story for over a month. As Cristina wrote, she frequently conversed with Karla about her writing as well as miscellaneous topics. Even though Cristina spoke throughout writing time, she was able to write and talk simultaneously and interchangeably. She did not lose track of her story because she reread her writing frequently. The continual revisiting and rereading ensured Cristina that her stories made sense and allowed her to recall her intentions.

While writing, Cristina held the evolving story in her head as she considered representation features such as spelling, grammar, and handwriting. As Cristina revealed during an interview, she created the setting, characters, and beginning plot in her head, prior to writing. Then, as ideas came to her, she added them to the story. After she laid the foundation for the story in writing, she returned to draw pictures. Cristina's pictures were a supplement; her story was in the writing. When I questioned Cristina about her strategies, she, along with Karla, revealed the following:

Karla: I just think that rough drafts are kind of stupid.

Cristina: I know, I don't like them very much unless I like mess up on mine.

Researcher: So you only like them if you really need them?

Cristina: Right.

Researcher: And not. . . because this is what you're supposed to do? . . .

Cristina: I don't think it makes any sense.

Karla: Neither do I.

Researcher: Would you say that you feel the same way about the story plan?

Karla: Yeah, but we don't need to [use it].

Researcher: And why don't you think you need to [use it]?

Karla: Because I already know what the story is going to be based on and stuff and that's exactly what the story plan is- what the story is going to be based on. Except I don't want to go through that [extra] writing.

Cristina: We want to get right to our story book.

Observations revealed that Cristina did not have the entire text pre-packaged in her mind prior to writing (Perl, 1980); her text emerged as she wrote. She did not need a piece of paper to plan her story prior to writing it. If Cristina had been forced to use the Story Plan, she would have had to write her story two times, and the spontaneity of the writing would have been lost.

Across other contexts, Cristina wrote in similar ways. She was adept at various forms of writing, especially the writing that originated through drama. She successfully switched perspectives and was able to write in different genres in a variety of roles.

Interactions with Sondra. Sondra offered Cristina writing challenges through individual conferences and whole group instruction. Across contexts, Sondra introduced Cristina to new writing techniques. When Sondra recognized that Cristina could incorporate more imagery and metaphor into her poetry writing, she suggested it to her. When Sondra reminded the class of the proper way to use punctuation marks, Cristina tried them out on her own.

For the most part, Sondra did not interfere with Cristina's texts, but in all writing contexts she discussed the writing with Cristina. Overall, Cristina's needs were met through diverse writing events from Journals to Writers as Writers to Unit Writing. Her writing development was challenged through the diversified writing instruction that Sondra provided.

Karla

Karla was a very striking child. She was bright, outgoing, talented, and bold. She was an above average, third-grade student who was well suited to Sondra's teaching style because she was imaginative, enthusiastic and, above all, dramatic. Karla's language, facial expressions, and ideas were driven by her sense of entertainment and fantasy.

Karla was also an agent of change. From the first days of school, she voiced her opinion and

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ideas about all issues, from determining the routines of the classroom to telling Sondra the way she should pass out folders. If Karla had an opinion, it was usually heard, and most often, followed. She was very persuasive, and if persuasion did not work, she was extremely persistent.

Karla's Writing Strategies. Karla was a multifaceted writer who integrated drawing, talk, and play into her writing in varying ways. As she wrote, she often said her words out loud, using varied intonations and expressions. She did not use story book language as much as she used oral storytelling techniques. As a result, Karla's most noticeable strategy was to include dialogue. She had an aural quality to her writing that was most noticeable during observations when she reread or composed her writing. Her words and her sentences were more like performances than text.

When I questioned Karla about her aural tendencies, she agreed with that characterization and confessed that she had a difficult time spelling words that represented the sounds people make while speaking, "Like I usually, sometimes it's hard to go like 'Ahhhh'. And like it's hard to figure out. And I like doing that kind of thing. . . It's hard to write because you can't think of what [letters] to put." Essentially, Karla was limited by written language because there were not as many avenues for her to express her dramatic nature; words did not make sounds.

During Writers as Writers, Karla wrote from personal experiences. She stated, "I usually don't really take from books, I take it from thinking about me and my friends particularly. Like I think about my life, sort of." Karla stated that she wrote as if she was in the story, actually experiencing it. She lived through her stories before she put the words on the page. In Karla's mind, she did not have an authorial stance that separated her from the story. As she wrote, she enacted the story in her head, and in this sense, writing paralleled play. Using her imagination, Karla was literally in the story, very much like playing on the playground.

In a similar way, Karla used her illustrations to record the visual images she held in her head before she wrote. As she created the "poetry book" story (Figure 2), she drew pictures prior to writing text because drawing the images was faster than writing the words. In Karla's mind, the story was in place; however, the words had not been written yet. Sometimes it seemed as if her mind was too fast for her pencil. In the following transcript, Karla explained her process.

Researcher: Do you make up [your story] as you go?

Karla: I just need to get the beginning.

Cristina: She knows what she wants to happen, but she doesn't know what to write.

Researcher: So you already know how it's going to end and everything?

Karla: [nods]

Researcher: So you know all that before you start writing?

Karla: Yeah. [sighs]. . .

Jia: Do you do this- - you start to make up the book while you're on another book?

Researcher: Do you start thinking about a new book while you're on your old book?

Karla: [Nodding] That's why I quit like two books.

This Writers as Writers transcript was a telling piece of data because Karla articulated her writing dilemmas. With Cristina and Jia's help, she identified the fact that her ideas were continuously flowing, and that contributed to her occasional inability to execute her writing plans. She was interested in the stories, but because they were already created in her head, she had difficulty reliving them on paper. In Karla's mind, the story had already been written and enacted.

Interactions with Sondra. Karla did not finish certain texts because she did not want to exert the effort to carefully describe the story. Karla had the same trouble during Journal Writing as well; her life had already been lived, so why write about it? Fortunately, Sondra gave Karla the freedom to develop her writing strategies through many successful and unsuccessful efforts. Sondra did not stifle Karla's imagination or force her to write and rewrite texts that were no longer interesting to her. However, Sondra did encourage Karla to finish other pieces at other times.

Although Karla occasionally had difficulty completing some texts, Unit Writing was usually a pleasurable task into which she put great effort. For example, as Karla created a newspaper article for Peace Valley, she was frustrated that portions of her text sounded like the front page but others did not. After discussions with Cristina, Sondra, and me, she continued to add to the article until the deadline was due. She never revised or rewrote the text. She just wrote more.

The structure of all writing times enabled Karla to discuss her ideas and talk about her text before writing it. Her frequent conversations with Cristina gave them partial ownership of each other's work. For Karla, Cristina served as an audience for the verbal text and a reader of the written text. Karla thrived in a context in which she could "plan" and "write" her stories before the pencil touched the page. Sondra supported Karla's need to talk and collaborate during writing by

allowing her to work with Cristina. Sondra had the insight and the understanding to recognize what a powerful writing team they were.

Teshawn. Teshawn was a wiry and talkative African American, second grader with average to above average writing abilities. She was a social girl who enjoyed school and talking with her friends. She had a close friendship with Cheryl, but she also included two other African American girls, Kianna and Thalia, in her peer group. During whole group discussions, Teshawn was occasionally attentive, but she also liked to carry on side conversations with other children.

During independent writing times, Teshawn continued to talk and play. Her eyes grew large as she discussed events from home or television. When Teshawn spoke, she lit up the room. She was very animated and enthusiastic. From a cousin's visit, to a night out at a Mexican restaurant, Teshawn viewed the events of her life as interesting and worth sharing.

Teshawn's Writing Strategies. Academically, Teshawn was a confident student who was proud of her ability to spell and read. At the onset of her second grade year, Sondra recognized Teshawn's superior reading ability and challenged her to read novels and difficult texts. Teshawn's reading ability set her apart from the other second grade girls and increased her confidence.

> Teshawn: Hey everytime I write wrong words and. . . then somebody tells me how to write it and I write it again, I know how to write it without even looking at it.
>
> Researcher: Really? . . . How do you do it? Do you have a picture in your head?
>
> Teshawn: Well I don't know, I'm just probably born like that.

Teshawn was proud of her abilities and, as a result, she was often impatient with other children who did not read or spell as quickly as she did. While she never openly criticized others, she communicated her exasperation through facial expressions and sighs. Interestingly, Teshawn often asked me for spellings. I interpreted her queries as a need for reassurance that she was correct, more than a real need for accurate spellings.

Teshawn's writing ideas came from life, but she was also greatly influenced by Disney movies and books. When I asked Teshawn about her story, "The Princess and the Treasure in the Castle" (Figure 3), she explained the origins of her ideas.

> Well I was just thinking of Snow White and Cinderella and all of those things and I made mine kind of like that and the Little Mermaid. And then I put it a different way so I

wouldn't be trying to copy off of the other. So I made it where. . . her daughter died and a tear drop fell and she awoke, instead of a prince kissing her.

Teshawn recognized that she borrowed themes and characters from Disney stories, but she altered them to create her own. She wanted to write stories that were filled with interesting characters and events so naturally she used ideas that were interesting to her when she read books.

When I questioned Teshawn about her individual process, she revealed, "I get my ideas before I make my book. Before I make my book, I know what the title's going to be." After determining the topic and title, Teshawn developed the content as she wrote. Texts were not prepackaged in her head, and she felt no need to use a Story Plan prior to writing. As Teshawn wrote, she rarely spoke, except to ask for the spelling of a word or to contribute to a miscellaneous conversation. She was able to transfer her internal thoughts to the paper without verbal rehearsal or sounding out. Then Teshawn added to her written text with pictures. She usually put great effort into her illustrations, and as she drew, she verbally embellished the story and the characters.

Interactions with Sondra.

Teshawn's interactions with Sondra were very limited because she was an independent and capable child. She did not need or want interference from Sondra; therefore, she rarely sought Sondra's feedback on works in progress. When Teshawn shared her completed texts, Sondra was usually pleased with her accomplishments. However, Teshawn was not interested in pleasing Sondra, she was more interested in pleasing herself and her mom.

However, there was an occasion when Teshawn needed Sondra's support. During a story sharing session, Teshawn read her "Princess and the Treasure in the Castle" (Figure 3) book to the class. Following her reading, Cristina suggested that Teshawn make the story longer and add more detail. Sondra agreed with Cristina but then she realized that Teshawn's feelings were hurt. Sondra put her arm around Teshawn and she changed the conversation to focus on the positive aspects of her text, but Teshawn was still disappointed. When I questioned Teshawn about the story sharing, she revealed the following.

Researcher: I wanted to ask you how you felt when you read your story to your class.

Teshawn: I felt good. I felt happy.

Researcher: Did you like what they had to say? . . .

Teshawn: Kind of.

Researcher: What do you mean?

Teshawn: Like, what Cristina said, she said it nicely, but I didn't like what she said. I was trying to make the book longer but I just couldn't think of anything to write.

Teshawn was visibly upset about Cristina's comments. During our interview, Teshawn indicated that the children did not understand the effort she put into the story, and she was angry. However, Sondra helped Teshawn emerge with a positive feeling towards her story.

Kianna

Kianna was a playful African American second grader who was a social child when she was with her peers: Cheryl, Teshawn, or Thalia. She loved to gossip, and she tended to tattle, even on her friends. Kianna appeared very happy and carefree, but many signs indicated that she was not.

One of Kianna's most noticeable characteristics was her low self-esteem. She was shy and self-conscious, and during my first interactions with her, she shrugged her shoulders and blushed. Eventually, Kianna greeted me with hugs and pleas for me to "watch her", but that occurred after many weeks of building her trust. In fact, whenever Kianna spoke with Sondra, or anyone outside of her social group, she appeared hesitant and shy, and she responded with one word answers.

Kianna's Writing Strategies. Kianna was a less accomplished writer than much of the class, and her process was labor intensive. She had to balance letter formation and spelling with her thoughts. This was a problem for Kianna because she had difficulty spelling many words conventionally. She did not have many experiences with words in print, and Kianna had a speech impediment that altered the sounds of her words as she pronounced them. However, what Kianna lacked in experience, she made up with problem solving. For example, Kianna knew that journal entries needed a date. Therefore, each morning she sat close to the calendar to copy the month correctly. Kianna was adept at using the environment to supplement her knowledge.

As Kianna created text, she orally rehearsed sentences before writing them. Then as she wrote the words, she spelled each letter out loud. Kianna wrote exactly what she said and how she said it. This was a very slow and tedious process because Kianna used environmental supports or she asked other children for spelling help. The frequent need for spelling interrupted Kianna's thoughts and the rhythm of her writing. The following transcript reveals her process.

Kianna: [Speaking to herself] g-r-g-r-a - nd - m - a - s. Every Xmas I go over my grandma's for presents. for - f-o-r - for presents. . . Teshawn, you know how to spell presents? [Teshawn spelled it for her.] I know. That's what I got. That's what I got. [Kianna wrote down the word while Teshawn spelled it. Kianna got up and went to the chart. She copied "Sondra", came back, and wrote again.] w-e-a-r - w-e-a-r - w-e-a-r. Every Xmas I go over my grandma's for presents - or no. [Reading out loud] Every Xmas I go over my grandma's - for presents. Sondra, do you, yes or no? [To Cheryl] I wrote two stories. It says, I'll read the whole thing. 'Every Xmas I go over to my grandma's for presents. Sondra do you, please tell me, please.'

Teshawn: That doesn't sound like a story. That sounds like a journal.

Thalia: No, it sounds like a riddle or something.

Teshawn: Yeah.

Kianna: What's a riddle?

Teshawn: A riddle is like you're making something rhyme or something. Like you're singing something and you making it like a rap.

As the transcript reveals, the frequent need for spelling help and the pauses in her writing, forced Kianna to reread often. Rereading was a positive strategy for Kianna to use, although it served more to mark her place than a strategy for developing her thoughts and the cohesion of the text. Following the writing of the text, Kianna drew pictures. Observations revealed that Kianna drew the pictures after she wrote because she was never really sure how the text would evolve.

In addition to highlighting Kianna's strategies, the previous transcript marked the beginning of an important event that occurred the following day. The title of Kianna's "Xmas Story" was crossed out and she wrote about a fat cat (Figure 4). I questioned her about the change.

Researcher: Why did you scribble the front?

Kianna: 'Cause I wanted rhymes.

Researcher: Rhymes? Why did you put rhymes? When did you do that?

Kianna: [Shrugs]

Researcher: Did you do that because they told you it sounded like rhymes yesterday?

Kianna: Uh huh.

Kianna's friends greatly impacted her writing. Their solicited and unsolicited feedback often lowered her confidence in herself and her texts. She frequently altered her writing to gain their acceptance or she purposely constructed her texts to gain entry into their conversations (e.g., Kianna created an interview book). Kianna also created texts to engage Sondra or me in conversations. In many ways, she used writing as a "ticket" and she also used "text as dialogic", i.e. the text mediated Kianna's relationships (Dyson 1995, p. 23).

Interactions with Sondra. Although Kianna understood the nature of many genres and the purpose of certain contexts, she had difficulty transitioning from one drama unit to another. She was able to write about the Peace Valley experience, but she had difficulty changing her role for the immigrant unit. She was conceptually limited by the switch to the immigration topic, and she also lacked the background knowledge to get into role quickly.

During these times, Kianna relied on Sondra to scaffold her learning. Sondra provided Kianna with supplemental knowledge of various genres as well as additional information for the units. Sondra supported Kianna with individualized instruction until she understood her tasks. Usually Kianna did not elicit Sondra's support, but she received it when she "checked" her paper with Sondra. These were difficult conferences because Kianna interpreted Sondra's questions as an indication that her writing was wrong. In fact, Kianna responded with silence and shrugs whenever anyone asked her questions about her writing. Sondra usually found ways to help Kianna understand or improve her writing. However, Kianna was often frustrated with Sondra's suggestions because it meant that she had to write all over again and the task was too laborious.

To accommodate Kianna's needs, Sondra began to meet with Kianna before she started writing. During one conference, Sondra explained the immigrant study to Kianna and helped her define her role. She supplied Kianna with information to help her begin to think about her role as an immigrant. This exchange helped make the immigrant unit more personal for Kianna, enabling her to write from imaginary experience. Kianna's interactions with Sondra became more positive because she received help before she began her writing tasks.

Ricky. Ricky was a happy and thoughtful second-grade boy who developed a close friendship with Anthony. In addition to Anthony, Ricky was friendly with other children, especially the boys who were rejected by other peer groups.

Ricky's Writing Strategies. In whole group settings, Ricky was a quiet child who shied away from vocal participation in class discussions. Although he was capable of making strong contributions to the whole group, he reserved his voice for small group moments or for independent writing times. Then, during more intimate times, he displayed his confidence and ability to direct other students. Ricky used writing time to display his superiority over students whom he viewed as "lesser" writers. Dyson (1995) described this manipulative use of text as a "ticket" to "directing or controlling. . .peers" (p. 23).

Anthony: Hey Ricky, come here and look at this. I want to show you a picture that's funny, Scottie Pippen. [It was Marc's picture.]

Marc: How you spell hoop?

Ricky: h-o- wait, wait - h-o-p. Your d is backwards. It says anb, anb. Ha Ha, Marc, you don't spell anything right.

Anthony: He doesn't even spell "I" right.

Ricky: Scottie Pippen made a hoop.

Anthony: He's a good drawer but not a very good writer.

Ironically, as Ricky was struggling to spell the words of his own text, he teased Marc for his misspellings. Then when Marc enlisted Ricky's help to spell "hoop", Ricky unknowingly spelled it incorrectly. Ricky overlooked his own weaknesses in order to point out Marc's problems.

Interestingly, Ricky was a developing writer himself. He had many writing ideas, but his writing was slow because he had not mastered the ability to both create and write texts at the same time. In the following transcript, several aspects of Ricky's process were revealed.

Ricky: I gotta finish this. [making elongated sounds of the words] waaaanted-ed - to - o-n-e - wanted to pick a small one [sounding out] ffffou, ou,ou n-d - nd [spelled fawnd].

Anthony: Give me some blue, light blue for the sky.

Ricky: Oops, I better erase that d, that d is sloppy - a - perrr - ffff-iiiickt c-h-r-i-s-m- um (He reread it out loud) He paid and took it home.

Anthony: . . .Your story is longer than mine I hope you know.

Ricky: I'm - look at this. . . it's my four (fourth) one but I'm writing longer. I wrote all this.

Ricky spelled his words letter by letter as he wrote them. He elongated the sounds of words as he thought of letters to represent the sounds. As a result, Ricky often lost his place in the text and he had to actively recall his thoughts. While writing, he frequently made statements such as, "Oh wait," or "Oh yeah!" Ricky reread his writing many times in order to determine his next sequence of words. This established pattern of rereading helped him to maintain the flow of his writing. He used these self-monitoring strategies to remember what he wanted to write or when he realized that he was writing in a different direction than he intended.

Essentially, despite competition for the longest book and his distracting spelling process, Ricky wrote in order to present ideas. The focus of his text was the message, not the messenger. Ricky monitored his writing in order for it to make sense. He checked his writing to ensure that it represented his intentions. The majority of his texts were based on personal experiences. If he did not write about an actual event in his life, he wrote texts based on real life experiences. For these reasons, Ricky was well suited to Journal Writing and Writers as Writers, during which he wrote variations of personal narratives.

Interacting with Sondra. The unit writing contexts and Sondra's instructional techniques helped Ricky gain experience with different kinds of writing. He developed an awareness of audience and a better sense of various genres because, according to Ricky, he participated in dramas and relaxation. One day during the peace unit, Sondra introduced the students to a green frog puppet named Hildegard. Sondra asked the children to work in small groups to create tableaux, or frozen scenes, of the frog's life. After Ricky witnessed the tableaux, he wrote a diary entry (Figure 5). Ricky stated that the tableaux helped him "see" into Hildegard's life and gave him writing ideas.

Ricky identified the exact reason why drama benefited him as a writer. Through discussions with the class, he learned about portions of Hildegard's life from Sondra. From watching and interpreting the tableaux, Ricky witnessed actual scenes from Hildegard's life. Within the drama, Ricky went beyond his own experiences and into Hildegard's memory. Using his imagination, along with movement, discussion, and visualization, the Peace Valley adventures became real. Therefore, when Ricky wrote, Hildegard's experiences were fresh in his mind.

Through the drama units, Sondra created contexts and used instructional techniques that helped Ricky develop as a writer. She led him to explore the limits of his imagination, and

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subsequently, what he experienced in drama became part of his life experience. This was an important strategy for Ricky, because he basically wrote from a repertoire of personal experiences. The drama activities took him outside of himself and into the perspectives of other people.

Discussion

The writing styles and strategies of these students revealed that there is more to writing than actual pen to paper behaviors. There is a whole child to consider - - a child with thoughts, ideas, preoccupations, and experiences. There is also the teacher who impacts the children's writing - - a teacher with her perceptions, beliefs, instructional contexts, and strategies.

Writing is Idiosyncratic

Every focus child was different. While they may have appeared to share similar qualities or characteristics, there were differences in how they formulated their ideas for writing, how they selected words to represent their thoughts, and how they transformed those words from their minds and mouths onto paper. For each child, writing was an idiosyncratic series of decisions, strategies, and behaviors that also fluctuated according to the context, the genre, and the writing instruction.

As a result of the complexity of the factors that influenced writing, different students naturally benefited from different types of instruction and contexts. Although Cristina, Karla, Teshawn, Kianna, and Ricky had different abilities and writing processes, Sondra was able to instruct them at their own developmental and academic levels. Sondra understood that each child had a unique writing progression. Therefore she created challenges for each child to move forward. Sondra's expectations were individualized.

Undo "The" Writing Process

Sondra did not set rigid standards for writing because specific expectations for writing would contradict her stated philosophical stance about children and their need for exploration and discovery through language. Therefore, in Sondra's classroom, there were no specified procedures for creating texts. For example, Kianna was not forced to create many drafts in order to "get it right"; Cristina was not penalized for creating stories in her head instead of on a planning sheet; and Karla was allowed to "quit stories". Sondra reconceptualized writing and instruction.

With regard to planning, many teachers believe that if students plan for their writing, their writing will improve. Although Sondra introduced the Story Plan, she did not require all writers to

plan in the same way. Vygotsky (1978) stated, "Planning has an important part in written speech, even when we do not actually write out a draft. Usually we say to ourselves what we are going to write; this is also a draft, though in thought only" (p. 243). Sondra encouraged her students to think about their writing in ways that were most compatible with their strategies.

Regarding publishing, Sondra stated that there should be purposeful reasons for students to rewrite and edit their writing. Therefore, she wanted the children to spend their time exploring written language. For the children, the "heart" of writing was not revision, but the spontaneous creation of text. They enjoyed writing and the excitement of an evolving text. In many respects, writing paralleled the act of playing. The children played with their ideas and words while writing. Many of the children said that they liked to make up their stories as they went along. As Berthoff (1981) stated, "Composing. . . is a means of discovering what we want to say, as well as being the saying of it" (p. 20). Although Sondra may be criticized for not correcting students' writing or helping them learn to revise, in this classroom, there was no place for perfection through revision.

Based on the data presented in the case studies of the five children, it was evident that writing was an entire production. Writing was the creation of ideas, the assembly of text, the selection of words, the creation of pictures, the neatness of handwriting, the accuracy of spelling and the reviews from peers and Sondra. Each child put his or her own level of attention on different aspects, but nonetheless, writing was a complicated, diverse and idiosyncratic process for each child.

Beyond Writing

In his or her own subtle way, each focus child used writing to interact with peers. Whether these interactions were positive or negative, writing was used in ways that were not planned by Sondra. Teachers can control many aspects of children's writing, but they can not control student intentions or the nature of their interactions. As Lensmire (1994) stated, ". . .children are not *only* the Romantic, innocent little beings that appear in the stories of workshop advocates. . .because neither workshop approaches, nor the role they envision for teachers, are so innocent" (p. 1).

Although Sondra did not use a writing workshop approach, her students, like Lensmire's, used their writing to socially position themselves in the classroom. They used writing to flex their intellectual muscle or to gain access into peer groups. Sondra was aware that the children

manipulated each other, and she made conscious efforts to promote peace. However, once children discovered the power of writing, she had to give them the freedom to explore.

Implications

This study revealed that contrasting writers were able to discover and refine their idiosyncratic writing processes within Sondra's classroom. Despite the differences in the children's styles and strategies, there were places for them to write in their preferred mode. There were also opportunities for Sondra to challenge each of them as writers. She made them stretch their limitations across all contexts. She did not have a static writing program, but she executed changing and fluid instructional strategies within diverse contexts. In addition to meeting and challenging the students' individual writing strategies, Sondra also accommodated the children's personal styles. Whether children were self conscious or outgoing, there was a context for them to express themselves.

Sondra developed a meandering writing program that was difficult to fix and define. Therefore, just as Kovac and Cahir (1981) asked, "When is reading?", I asked, "When is writing?" In Sondra's classroom, writing was all day; it was everyday; it was consistent; it was inconsistent; it was functional; it was imaginative; it was engaging; it was boring; it was structured; it was unstructured; it was an eclectic assortment of strategies, used across a variety of contexts in order to meet the needs of all the children in the classroom. As a writing teacher, Sondra was a chameleon. She was attuned to the children and aware of their ever-changing needs. She was able to create convertible classroom environments and adapt her instruction to meet the needs of the students in those situations. She was different things to different children.

Research needs to continue to reconceptualize child writers so that we are able to view them as individuals who are communicating thoughts, not writers performing a series of tasks. These five children offer views of how some children write, but what about others? If we understand what children actually do when they write, then writing instruction can be reconceptualized. Sondra's individualized strategies and her unique contexts for instruction offer new suggestions, but not a prescriptive recipe, for how writing can be reconceptualized and taught to all children.

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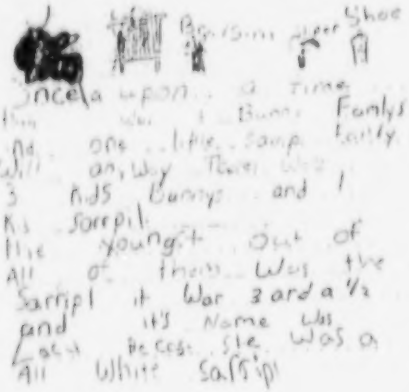
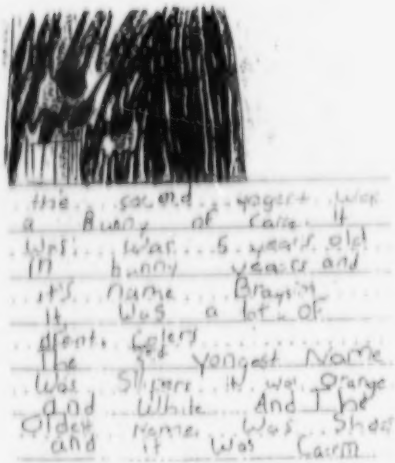
Appendix

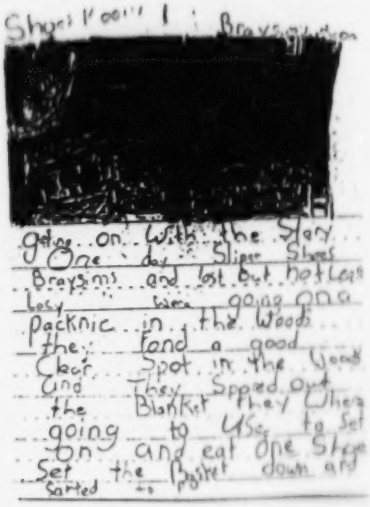
Figure 1. Cristina's story, "The Three Little Bunnies and One Little Squirrel", pages one, two, and three.



Standardized Text
Once upon a time there were three bunny families and one squirrel family. Well anyway, there were three kid bunnies and one kid squirrel. The youngest out of all of them was the squirrel. It was three and a half and it's name was Lacy because she was an all white squirrel


the second youngest Was
a Bunny of Cors. It
Was five Years old
in bunny Years and
it's name Braysim
It Was a lot of
diffent Colors
The 3rd youngest Name
Was Slippers it was Orange
and White And the
Oldest name Was Shoes
and it Was Cream

Standardized Text
The second youngest was a bunny of course. It was five years old in bunny years and it's name (was) Braysim. It was a lot of different colors. The third youngest name was Slippers. It was orange and white. And the oldest's name was Shoes and it was cream.


getting on With the Story
One day Slipe Shoes
Braysims and last But not Least
Lesy were going ona
Packnic in the Woods
they found a good
Clear Spot in the Woods
and they Spped out
the Blanket they Were
going to Use to Set
on and eat one Shoe
Set the Basket down and
Sarted to

Standardized Text
Getting on with the story. One day Slippers, Shoes, Braysim, and last but not least, Lacy, were going on a picnic in the woods. They found a good, clear spot in the woods and they spread out the blanket they were going to use to sit on and eat. Once Shoes set the basket down and started to po...

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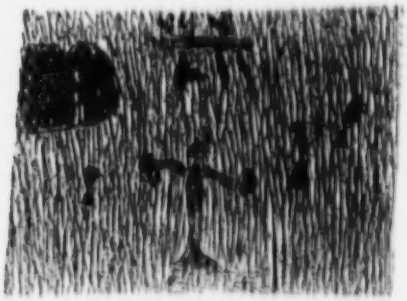
Figure 2. Karla's "Poetry Story" book, page 5.

Figure 3. Teshawn's "The Princess and the Treasure in the Castle" Story, page 1.

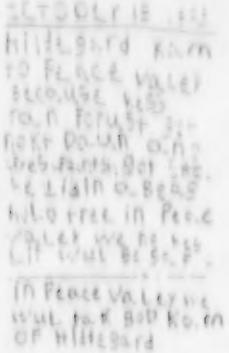


Standardized Text
Once upon a time there was a princess named Princess Teshawn. She lived in water. She's a mermaid. When she went out the castle for a swim far far away she found some treasure and swam all the way back to the castle. She said mom, dad, look I found some treasure. Her mom and dad looked at it and said, "You really found some treasure. Lets sell it so we can get...

Figure 4. Kianna's Fat Cat story.

Standardized Text
Fat cat Teshawn. Fat cat Teshawn went up the tree. The tree start to shaking

Figure 5. Ricky's peace diary entry about Hildegard.



Standardized Text
Hildegard came to Peace Valley because his rain forest got knocked down and his parents got killed. He lives in a big hollow tree in Peace Valley. We know his life will be safe in Peace Valley we will take good care of Hildegard.

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